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News Release

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Corps of Engineers and State of Maryland to build bird habitats at Hart-Miller Island

Baltimore – While Hart-Miller Island is already home to thousands of area boaters every summer, thousands of birds will soon take refuge on the south cell of the island in the Chesapeake Bay, thanks to an agreement signed today at a ceremony in Baltimore's World Trade Center. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, and Maryland Port Administration leaders signed a project cooperation agreement that will develop bird habitat and a park on the island's south cell, adapting it to its new purpose, a wildlife habitat.

"The Army Corps of Engineers is proud to be a partner in this unique opportunity to improve the quality and diversity of the environmental resources on Hart-Island's south cell," said Col. Charles J. Fiala, Jr., commander of the Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District. "This project not only provides key bird habitat, it also demonstrates the innovative use of dredged material placement sites."

John D. Porcari, Secretary of Maryland's Department of Transportation, signed on behalf of the state. "With this agreement, we move in concert with our values and goals as stewards of the Chesapeake Bay, and move forward with a program that will clearly benefit the bay," said Secretary Porcari. "The evolution of this project will benefit the citizens of Maryland for years to come."

The Hart-Miller environmental restoration project will create seven acres of trees, a three-acre pond, a bird-nesting island, 184 acres of wetlands and mudflats for shorebird habitat, and 110 acres of upland grasses designed as habitat for songbirds. This project is expected to significantly improve wildlife ecosystem diversity in the northern Chesapeake and create a major stopover site for migratory shorebirds.

The 1,100-acre, man-made Hart-Miller Island, located in open waters of the Chesapeake in Baltimore County, comprises two "cells" formed by dikes. The cells have been placement sites for dredged material from the port of Baltimore. The active north cell is still in use and has become well known for its extensive bird populations. Adding extensive bird habitat and reducing invasive species and mosquitoes will now enhance the 300-acre south cell, which was closed in 1991. The \$5.4 million costs of the project will be shared between the Corps and state.

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Other federal and state agencies and key local groups back the Hart-Miller environmental restoration effort. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources is actively involved and will operate and maintain the project upon its completion in 2009. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Maryland Department of the Environment and Maryland Environmental Services along with the Hart-Miller Citizens Oversight Committee, the Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Commission and the Maryland Ornithological Society have endorsed the project.

Plans and specifications should be completed by March. The project is expected to take about one year to construct, culminating in the re-flooding of the cell in the spring of 2003.

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